

Webster Meeting House
Webster
Merrimack County
New Hampshire

HABS No. NH-170

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

WEBSTER MEETING HOUSE

HABS No. NH-170

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Location: Corser Hill, Webster, Merrimack County,
New Hampshire

Present Owner: Society for the Preservation of the Old
Meeting House in Webster, New Hampshire

Present Occupant: Same .

Present Use: Museum of rural and farming artifacts

Brief Statement of Significance: Typical, oblong, austere, frame,
pitched roof New England Meeting house with
entrance in the middle of long side. No
tower or spire. Used strictly for town
meetings from 1860 to 1942.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History.

1. Original and subsequent owners: Erected in 1791 on land owned by town of West Boscawen /Town records; see also Charles C. Coffin, History of Boscawen and Webster from 1733 to 1878, Concord, 1878, p. 137/. West Boscawen changed to town of Webster July 4, 1860; Meeting house owned by town of Webster until 1942 when it was purchased by the present owners.
2. Date of Erection: 1791 /Town records; see also Ebenezer Price, Chronological Register of Boscawen, Concord, 1823, p. 73/.
3. Architect: Samuel Jackman, joiner (1749-1845) /Price, p. 73; Coffin, p. 139, 559; also town records/ "Mr. Samuel Jackman contracted to procure a frame for 94 dollars; the workmanship was so satisfactory to the town, that a consideration was made to Mr. J. of \$16 68 cents." - Price.

Builder, Suppliers, etc. Pine boards furnished by one Captain Stone. /W. G. Buxton, History..., p. 1037.
4. Original plans, construction, etc: None known.
5. Notes on alterations and additions: Originally built in a different location: on the East side of the Blackwater river, down in the valley "near the corner of Mr. Cogswills land". /Town Records of Boscawen, 1791/. Moved up Corser hill to its present

location in 1941/2 because of the Blackwater flood control project /Dartmouth-Lake Sunapee Reigon Echos, Vol 2, Nr. 4, Oct. 1941/. It was remodeled in 1844 by the Christian Union Society; flooring was put over the galleries, the east and west porches were removed, and a "convenient chapel" was made of the upper story, the lower floor being reserved for a town-house /Coffin, p. 242/. The building was restored by the Old Meeting House Cemetery Association in 1902 /Willis G. Buxton, History Boscawen-Webster, Fifty Years, 1883-1933, Penacook, N. H., 1933, p. 103/ It has been kept painted and in good repair by the Society for the Preservation of the Old Meeting House in Webster since 1942.

6. Important old views:.

Coffin, p. 140, wood engraving showing attached shed.

B. Historical Events Connected with Structure:

1. The meetinghouse was built because the residents of West Boscawen were fed up with walking 5 miles, especially in winter, into the regular Boscawen Meetinghouse. Throughout its history the town owned the frame and individuals owned the pews. From 1791 until 1823 there was no one church or society in sole possession of the structure. It was used by the Westerly Religious Society from 1804 until 1823. There was great civic controversy in the years 1820-23 as to who had legal rights to the building because of the private ownership of the pews; after 1823 it was occupied solely by the Christian Union Society, the Westerly Religious Society having withdrawn and built the Corser Hill Meetinghouse (q.v.). /Coffin, pp. 236-242/

Prepared by: Charles B. Wood, III
N. H. Historical Soc.
March 1964

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION.

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: Exterior appearance absolutely original and characteristic of its generic type of New England Meetinghouse; interior considerably altered but still retains upper galleries and supporting columns. Considerable sentimental value attached to this building locally and state wide.
2. Condition of Fabric: Good; well maintained (on exterior).

B. Technical description of Exterior:

1. Overall Dimensions:
2. Foundations: Large granite blocks.
3. Wall Construction: Vertical stud construction, lath and plaster inside, clapboards exterior.
4. Porches, etc.: None
5. Chimneys: None

6. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: Main (front) doorway is simple opening with no ornamentation save for a rectangular surround of square moulding with applied squares of wood at each upper corner. Side doorways same. Doors: Main entrance consists of double doors, each of 5 panels. Horizontal transom light of five panes above. Hung on modern butt hinges. Side doors single, otherwise same.
- b. Windows and shutters: 16 over 12 double hung sash; simple wood frames recessed c. 3" from wall surface. No shutters.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Simple pitch roof; covered with wood shingles.
- b. Cornice, eaves: simple box cornice along eaves with large quarter round and ovolo moldings. No raking cornice. No leaders or gutters.
- c. Dormers, cupolas: None

- d. Frame: All framework in excellent condition. Roof framing consists of four sets of principals with doubled top chords and king-posts; these four trusses are further strengthened by cross braces running longitudinally between the king-posts. Framework entirely of oak. Roofers of wide pine boards laid vertically over purlins.

C. Technical Description of Interior.

1. Floor plans: The main floor consists of a central hall (which was originally two storey) defined by six Tuscan Doric columns of solid wood on pedestals. The two flanking aisles (E & W) are defined by downward and inward slanting plastered ceilings, indicating the angle of banked pews in galleries. There are no pews left on ground floor, but there are holes in the floor where the "sheep-pen" pews were inserted. The main entrance opens into a shallow hall with staircases leading up to the left and right. There are no remains of the original pulpit. The second floor contains the original gallery pews; these are simple boxes with scrolled arms. Raised podium with organ platform on South side.
2. Stairways: Two, each a single run walled in on either side. They rise in opposite directions (E & W) from the entrance hall.
3. Flooring: Original; random width pine boards, some 20" wide. Main floor laid on log joists, visible through windows in foundation.
4. Wall and Ceiling finish: Original plaster and lath on walls and ceiling. Oak posts of frame project through all walls; they are uncased, but are chamfered. The ceiling in the central portion of the main floor (as covered over in 1840) consists of exposed girts, joists and flooring boards. Coved plaster ceiling in upper storey. A few traces left of painted graining in various places.
5. Doorways and doors: Two, leading to stairways. Simple batten type.
6. Trim: Little original trim. Noteworthy are the ovolo moldings around the tops of the architrave blocks which rest on top of the columns in main floor.
7. Hardware: almost all 19th century replacements.
8. Lighting: None.
9. Heating: None.

D. Site.

1. General Setting and Orientation: Facade of building faces south (note that the building was moved from its original location). Is presently situated high on the south crest of Corser Hill and has an impressive view.
2. Enclosures: Stone wall on west side.
3. Outbuildings: None
4. Walks, Driveways, etc: None.
5. Lanscaping, Gardens, etc: None.

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